

Assessment of Nutrition and Exercise Science Programs at the Land-Grant Universities: Background and Methods

This is an exciting time for the academic and professional fields related to health, nutrition, and exercise science. Better understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, coupled with nationwide attention on such health problems as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis present many opportunities and challenges to university campuses. These include recruiting faculty skilled in health, nutrition and/or exercise science; integrating program offerings of nutrition and exercise science courses with opportunities for internships or practicum; conducting multidisciplinary research with on-site health centers; and providing adequate outreach of nutrition and physical activity education to address the health needs and concerns of communities, families, and individuals.

In most cases, to meet these challenges land-grant universities need to change, modify, or enhance existing nutrition programs to include an exercise science emphasis or option as well as health education and health promotion program areas. To assess the current situation, CSREES consulted with Dr. Melinda Manore, professor in the Department of Nutrition and Exercise Science at Oregon State University. Her expertise in nutrition and exercise science, affiliation with both nutrition and exercise science professional organizations, and her appointment with a land-grant university allowed for critical review of such programs. Manore placed emphasis on assessing the number and types of nutrition and exercise programs currently in place at the undergraduate and graduate levels to benchmark successful programs from a national perspective. She identified those programs in the land-grant system that integrate nutrition and exercise science into one program, are rigorous in science, and provide an opportunity for the American Dietetic Association's Didactic Program in Dietetics. She also addresses other programs that prepare for the American College of Sports Medicine certification or other degree options, such as fitness and nutrition and dietetics with exercise.

In addition, the information supports CSREES strategically in its promotion of healthier eating habits and lifestyles and its higher education sponsorship for students as the next successful generation of research scientists, educators, and practitioners.